

Judge David's Rules for Parenting

“How can the village to
raise the child
if the parents aren’t part
of the village?”

Translation:

Parents are the key.
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The key to successful Parenting is reducing your dependence on lady luck. In other words, the more active, involved, informed, and dedicated you are to being a “good” parent, the more likely you are to survive---and help your child survive their childhood. These are my thoughts on successful parenting - from my personal relationships and my experience on the bench. They are my **very frank** observations. My intent is not to offend you. Please read and understand that I want each of your children to succeed and to feel good about themselves for who they are and what they are capable of doing with their life. And remember, if you are following most of these suggestions, there are parents out there that don’t subscribe to any of them! So beware.

On Sex...

Tell your son and your daughter that is not permitted. Tell them why this is dangerous behavior. Remind them. Monitor them. Ask the tough questions. Set an appropriate example. If you are a single parent and your bedroom is a revolving door, expect the same from your child. Understand that they are not emotionally equipped to deal with a sexual relationship no matter what they think. Do not encourage. Do not make light of the seriousness. If they think you don't care or don't mind then rest assured, there is a 50% chance they will have sex before the age of 15, and not just once. Your goal? Postpone sex as long as possible. Until marriage is your goal, but age 20 is better than age 15, age 18 better than age 13.

And another thing on Sex...

NO ONE UNDER 16 CAN *CONSENT* TO SEX!

Tell your son. Tell your daughter. **The consequences could include a juvenile record and a requirement to register as a sex offender.** Don't put the prosecutor's office in charge of your child's future.

On their clothing...

Freedom to choose something different than what we wore or what we expect is part of growing up. Unrestrained choice, however, is nothing more than an abdication of your responsibility as a parent. You are still in charge and you are still responsible. Pants down around the knees. Hip hugging pants showing off underwear is a poor reflection of your child and you. If your child is not mature enough to make appropriate choices within the guidelines you establish, then you better be prepared to step up and parent.

On being your child's friend...

A noble goal but the reality is that your first obligation is to protect your child. Too often we equate being the child's best friend as being a great parent. Not necessarily so. After age 10 or 11, you probably won't be their best friend. Bottom line is being the parent first. All else is gravy. If you are consumed with being their best friend, ask yourself, "then who will be their parent?"

On knowing your child's friends...

Would you loan your car to a complete stranger on the promise that they would return it

the next day? Of course not. Then why would you allow your son or daughter to spend the night at someone's home when you don't know that person? You shouldn't. You should meet the parents and talk to the parents and insure there will be parental supervision and **insure that they even know that your child is supposed to be staying there!** But don't stop there. Make sure that the parent knows that you don't approve of your child going with their child to another location or staying overnight somewhere else - even if it is with someone else you know.

On the fact that parenting does not get easier as your child gets older...

It doesn't. It gets harder. A 13-year old needs more attention than an 11 year old. A 16-year old is probably more vulnerable to peer pressure than the 14-year old. Stay committed. Stay focused. Don't let their somewhat grown up look and dress and limited reasoning lead you astray. The human brain is not fully developed until age 25 (and later for some of our children). Judgment and emotional control are the last to fully develop.

On the smell and talk test...

Every child should know from day one that when they come home they will go to their mom and/or dad's bedroom or wherever mom and/or dad are to report in. I know it is not the Army, but it is the best plan. No quick comment as they run up stairs. No limited conversations with short "yes" or "no" answers. You want meaningful face to face contact. You want to see the eyes, smell the breath and hear a lucid conversation, not a canned presentation. If they know this is the expectation, they are less likely to put themselves at risk; if they do, you are more likely to find out.

On tattoos, breast enlargements, tongue piercings, other piercings, and other such nonsense...

Under 18? No way. What are we teaching are children? You are not attractive enough unless you get a tattoo or breast enlargement or other cosmetic surgery? You are only going to be cool if you have one or two tattoos? Who is in charge - you or the child? What message are you sending your child? What message are you sending your other children? Tell me why in the world a 16-year old needs a tongue ring! Do you have so little regard for your child

that you would allow them to deface themselves? Are you that shallow? That afraid of saying no? Have you ever contemplated teaching and instilling self esteem and self respect? If you can't say no to this nonsense, good luck.

On alcohol and drugs...

No no no and no. Make your expectations clear. Make your consequences clear. You are not the child. Your past is not relevant. The drugs out there now are very dangerous. The alcohol is too available. There are too many kids and adults waiting in the shadows for your son or daughter to get drunk. Alcohol and drugs lead to uninhibited behavior and allow people to do what they might otherwise not do. Think about your daughter using alcohol and then being sexually assaulted - it is **25 times more likely** to happen when alcohol is involved. Are you ready for a grandchild? Are you ready to deal with the trauma to your child? Again, there are adults and teenagers just waiting patiently for the opportunity. Got a son? Same risks. The behavior that results might be a little different, perhaps even more dangerous. The bottom line is that alcohol and drugs are bad. There is no such thing as a supervised party and no justification for underage drinking. Make sure your children stay away from that minority of parents that believe it is

okay to serve alcohol to their children and to **YOURS** in a controlled environment. There is no such thing.

And remember - if your child grows up seeing that you are not able to watch a ball game or socialize with anyone without a drink in your hand, it will probably be learned behavior on their part and they may be such good learners that they start emulating your behavior early.

On being a single parent...

You **CAN** raise a child or children successfully. Keep the faith. Do not hesitate to fall in love again, but make sure your child knows that they are the most important person in your life and no one will ever take priority over them - not your boyfriend or girlfriend, or new spouse. Tell them this over and over and keep your word. Kids get scared. They will stay scared if you don't reassure them.

On being a divorced parent...

DON'T say anything bad about the other parent in front of your child. When you do you say something bad about their parent imagine someone disparaging your parent when you were their age. At your age, be it 25 or 35 or 45, you have the mental and emotional ability to deal with that. Your child does not! Do your child a favor - the next

time they come back from parenting time with the other parent, don't quiz them. Try saying these things and watching the physical reaction of your child: "How was your time at Dad's (Mom's)?" "That is great, I am glad" "How is your Mom (Dad)?" "Great, I hope they are doing well" "So, what do you want for supper". Try it. You will see your child transform in front of you from uptight to more relaxed. And then try it again and mean it!

On peer pressure...

It only gets worse as your child gets older. It can lead the best-intentioned and best-parented child astray. Be ever vigilant. Try to encourage your child's friends to come to your house. Engage the other children's parents. Be **very** involved. If your child's friends want them to do something that is wrong, they can be very creative and manipulative and secretive. Be vigilant. There are parents out there that think it is okay to have their 16-year-old daughter move in with her 19-year-old boyfriend across town. If your daughter is the friend of the 16-year-old, would you know that?

On limiting their potential to get in trouble...

Unsupervised children are at the greatest risk! When you lose track of where your child is and who they are with you are in big trouble. The most dangerous times for your children are from after school until an adult gets home, Friday nights, and Saturday nights.

On driving the car...

Be careful. Have rules. Restate the rules often. State the consequences clearly. Enforce the rules. Enforce the consequences.

On debating your kids...

It is certainly permissible to hear your child's position and point of view. It is very important to encourage freedom of expression and development of the thought process and decision-making. However, you are responsible for your child. Don't abandon that responsibility or delegate it to your child. If they come home late beyond their curfew don't let them turn the conversation into the "You don't trust me" conversation. Stay focused on the issue.

On Spring Break...

Never allow your child go out of the country unless you are with them or they are with someone that you would trust with your own life. The laws are not the same in other countries. There are all kinds of risks that you don't have a clue about. If you are allowing your teenager to go to Florida with "their friends" and without an adult, you are telling them "go drink, do drugs, have sex - but don't get hurt and don't tell me". Think about it.

On this place called HOOTERS...

Don't take your children there! I know too many people that like to take their little league teams to Hooters after a game or drag their 13-year-old daughter there to eat. Good parents but I think they are missing my point. No, it is not that the wings are bad. It is the message you are sending to your son or to your daughter. It is not like there is no other place to eat. I don't believe Hooters is a family restaurant. I have nothing against Hooters but I don't think adolescents need to be there. Our young boys have enough pressure on them to be boys. They don't need to be parked at a table at the only G rated adult entertainment place in

town so that Dad can ogle. And our little girls have enough self esteem issues already without having to sit and eat and watch Dad ogle at the waitresses.

On Cell phones, pagers and beepers...

Why? Ask yourself that question. If your only justification is so that you know where your children are, ask yourself - what did the last generation of parents do to without cell phones and pagers and beepers? They parented! They knew where their kids were and kept track of them and the children knew what was expected of them. If you go down this road of providing or allowing cell phones and pagers and beepers, remember that you are not the only one that has instant access to your child. You just gave them the ability to communicate with **ANYONE, ANYWHERE, ANYTIME!** Remember that. Of course there are some good reasons for allowing your child to have a cell phone but they should be of the right age and it is your call, not theirs!

On drug testing your child...

You can. You have the right. Make sure they know that. You have the right to search their room and turn

everything upside down if you need to. Be prepared to do anything to keep your child safe, and if necessary, protect them from themselves.

On being the “bad guy”...

Make it clear to your child that they may use you as the bad guy anytime they want. If they aren't able to make the decisions they need to make on their own, tell them to use you and abuse you. In other words, if they are at a party and the drugs arrive and they are offered and encouraged, talk to them about how they could handle the situation. “I can't do that cause when I get home I have to kiss my mom goodnight and recite the alphabet backwards.” Step up to the plate and let them squarely blame you if that helps them avoid problems. Give them some suggested exit strategies. For example, your daughter is somewhere where she probably should not be and alcohol arrives along with a few 20-year-olds. In such a situation, you can have a prearranged plan where she says something like, “Oh know, what time is it, I forgot to call my stupid parents” and then she calls you and makes up her side of the conversation but you know that means she needs you to pick her up or order her home. She gets out of the situation and you are the bad guy...and that is okay.

On OVER scheduling your children...

This is a touchy subject. If you as a parent are struggling and stressed out getting your child or children from Dance to Softball to Karate to Music to School to Practice to Grandmas, imagine what is going inside their little heads with the significantly less coping skills and cognitive skills they have. Maybe you need to slow down a little or a lot and save yourself and your children. They don't have to be in every activity. You don't have to keep up with the Joneses. If you need a GPS device and a palm pilot just to remember where your children are or where you need to take them, there is too much going on in their lives. There is no research anywhere that says kids that meet themselves coming and going or that is programmed 24-7 are more likely to be better CEOs than those who aren't. Save your children while saving your sanity and perhaps your marriage.

On UNDER scheduling your children...

See above. This is the corollary and it is also dangerous. Regardless of their age, you should have a plan for your child. Call it chores, tasks, or expectations, there should be no living in front of the TV. They need a routine

as much as you do. Routine is good. Change is not bad but a constant lack of routine or constant change is not good.

On talking to your children...

Headphones should not be permitted during the Thanksgiving dinner or at any other time you determine that you don't want to be tuned out. I like wearing headphones when I run but not when I am trying to interact with someone. Your trips in the car should include some real life conversation with your teenager, not just an inquiry whether you need to stop for batteries for their headset. Your young children need to understand that conversations (and occasionally arguments) are part of the ride in the family van, not just a mobile DVD experience. My philosophy is to keep talking, encourage conversations, make up conversations, push conversations, express your opinions, state your philosophy, seek their opinions, ask them questions, and repeat often. You will have some success. Sometimes you will get nothing more than "whatever" but don't give up. They may not have mouths to speak but they do have ears to hear and they do retain. Just because they don't talk back does not mean they do not understand what you are saying.

On Parenting in general...

Assume that this is the most important role you will ever have. Take it seriously. Understand that your children's lives are in your hand. Make sure you children understand that your success is not measured by the car you drive, the square footage of your home, or even your title or job, but your children's and your family's health and happiness. Tell them you love them. Show them you love them. They are not little trophies to pull off the shelf, show off and put back on the shelf. You can't just schedule "quality time" with your children fifteen minutes here or fifteen minutes there. You are on duty 24-7 and you must understand that and must be willing to accept that responsibility.

On sharing your thoughts with me...

I welcome your comments and your experiences and your suggestions. I intend to continue this project and add to it from time to time. I may be contacted at sdavid@co.boone.in.us. If your school or church or organization would like me to come and speak to you about my experiences as a Juvenile Court Judge or the challenges facing our parents or children, I would be honored to do so.